

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method for controlling a plurality of message transfer
2 operations between a plurality of nodes, the method comprises:
3 detecting a request from a first node to switch the first node to a
4 separate communication loop;
5 switching the first node to the separate communication loop;
6 detecting a request from the first node to open message transfer
7 operation between the first node and a second node; and
8 switching the second node to the separate communication loop
9 when the second node is not busy.

1 2. The method of claim 1 wherein all of the nodes are
2 switched to form a main communication loop upon initialization.

1 3. The method of claim 1 wherein upon initialization all of the
2 nodes have a status of not busy, the method further comprising setting the status
3 of the first node and the second node to busy after the second node is switched to
4 the separate communication loop.

1 4. The method of claim 1 further comprising facilitating
2 message transfer operation between the first node and second node on the separate
3 communication loop.

1 5. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 closing message transfer operation;
3 setting the status of the first node and the second node to not busy
4 after closing message transfer operation;
5 switching the first node out of the separate communication loop;
6 and
7 switching the second node out of the separate communication loop.

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1 6. The method of claim 5 further comprising waiting for a
2 predetermined amount of time after at least one of setting the status of the first
3 node to not busy and setting the status of the second node to not busy before
4 switching the first node and the second node out of the separate communication
5 loop.

1 7. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 acknowledging to the first node the request to open message
3 transfer operation after detecting a request from the first node to open message
4 transfer operation;
5 notifying the first node that the second node is busy in response to
6 the status of the second node being busy; and
7 notifying the second node of the request to open message transfer
8 operation after switching the second node to the separate communication loop.

1 8. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 detecting a request from a third node to open a second message
3 transfer operation between the third node and the second node; and
4 switching the third node to the separate communication loop.

1 9. The method of claim 8 further comprising:
2 acknowledging to the third node the request to open the second
3 message transfer operation after detecting the request from the third node to open
4 a second message transfer operation;
5 notifying the third node that the second node is busy in response to
6 the status of the second node being busy; and
7 notifying the second node of the request to open the second
8 message transfer operation after switching the third node to the separate
9 communication loop.

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1 10. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
2 detecting a request from the first node to open a third message
3 transfer operation between the first node and a fourth node; and
4 switching the fourth node to the separate communication loop.

1 11. The method of claim 10 further comprising:
2 acknowledging to the first node the request to open the third
3 message transfer operation after detecting the request from the first node to open
4 the third message transfer operation;
5 notifying the first node that the fourth node is busy if the status of
6 the fourth node is busy; and
7 notifying the fourth node of the request to open the third message
8 transfer operation after switching the fourth node to the separate communication
9 loop.

1 12. The method of claim 1 wherein the network is a Fibre
2 Channel arbitrated loop network.

1 13. A switching hub for use in a network having a plurality of
2 nodes each connected to the switching hub by a sending channel and a receiving
3 channel, each node sending at least one connection message, the switching hub
4 comprising:
5 an interconnect switch for connecting the sending channel and the
6 receiving channel of each node into at least one separate communication loop;
7 a plurality of port interfaces, each port interface linking the
8 respective receiving channel and the respective sending channel of each node to
9 the interconnect switch, each port interface detecting messages on the receiving
10 channel; and
11 a controller in communication with the plurality of port interfaces
12 and the interconnect switch, the controller controlling the interconnect switch to

13 form at least one separate communication loop based on at least one detected message.

1 14. The switching hub of claim 13 wherein the plurality of
2 nodes communicate with each other using a protocol having a plurality of
3 messages and defining message types of at least Arbitration having at least a
4 source addresses, Open having at least a source address and a destination address,
5 and Close.

1 15. The switching hub of claim 13 wherein the plurality of
2 nodes are switched to form a main communication loop upon initialization.

1 16. The switching hub of claim 13 wherein the message types
2 include Busy and Idle.

1 17. The switching hub of claim 13 wherein the controller is
2 further responsive to a predetermined time-out period before releasing each node
3 from the at least one separate communication loop.

1 18. The switching hub of claim 13 wherein the controller forms
2 a separate communication loop connecting a first node and a second node, the
3 first node requesting access to the second node.

1 19. The switching hub of claim 18 wherein the controller forms
2 the separate communication loop connecting a third node requested by the first
3 node.

1 20. The switching hub of claim 18 wherein the controller forms
2 the separate communication loop connecting a fourth node requesting access to
3 the second node.

10 a controller in communication with each port interface and the
11 interconnect device, the controller operative to signal the interconnect device to
12 form at least one separate communication loop including at least two nodes.

1 25. A hub as in claim 24 wherein the controller forms each
2 separate communication loop based on a message received from at least one port
3 included in the separate communication loop.

1 26. A hub as in claim 24 wherein each port interface generates
2 the message based on signals received from at least one port in a Fibre Channel
3 protocol.

1 27. A hub as in claim 24 wherein the controller establishes
2 every port in one loop upon initialization.

1 28. A method of interconnecting a plurality of nodes
2 comprising:
3 receiving a request from a first node to access a second node;
4 determining if the second node is not busy; and
5 if the second node is not busy, forming a separate communication
6 loop comprising the first node and the second node.

1 29. A method of interconnecting a plurality of nodes as in claim
2 28 further comprising:
3 receiving a request from the first node to access a third node;
4 determining that the third node is not busy; and
5 if the third node is not busy, joining the third node in the separate
6 loop comprising the first node and the second node.

1 30. A method of interconnecting a plurality of nodes as in claim
2 28 wherein the received request conforms to a Fibre Channel protocol.

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1 31. A method of interconnecting a plurality of nodes as in claim
2 28 further comprising interconnecting each node in one loop upon initialization.

1 32. A method of interconnecting a plurality of nodes as in claim
2 28 wherein the second node is detached from a second loop before forming the
3 separate communication loop.

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